DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 104 503 JC 750 291

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TITLE	Summary and Conclusions of a Survey of Residents Residing Within a Three-Mile Radius of the Downtown Center [Bakersfield College (California)].
INSTITUTION	Bakersfield Coll., Calif.
PUB DATE	Nov 73
NOTE	5p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	Community Attitudes; Community Schools; Community Study; *Community Surveys; *Educational Needs; Enrollment Influences; *Junior Colleges; *Off Campus Facilities; *Outreach Programs; Student Participation; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Bakersfield College; California (Bakersfield); Needs Assessment

ABSTRACT

To assess the needs of residents in proximity to the Downtown Center of Bakersfield College (California), a stratified random sampling of addresses was chosen and adults at each address were interviewed. A total of 422 interviews were conducted by sociology students from the college and by paid student interviewers. Thirty-five percent of the respondents indicated less than a high school education, and another 27 percent had no postsecondary education. Of the 38 percent of the respondents with college experience, less than 12 percent claimed to have earned a degree at any level. Vocational preparation and remedial reading and arithmetic were ranked as the goals that the community feels should be given top priority at the college. Along the same lines, vocational and curriculum counseling were rated as more important than personal problems counseling. Perceptions regarding the college, its Downtown Center, and postsecondary education in general are also reviewed. Of note is the finding that 69 percent of the Chicano respondents favored Spanish language instruction for selected courses. (Author/AH)

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To: Faculty and Administration
From: Claire J. Larsen
Date: November 1, 1973
Subject: Summary and Conclusions of a Survey of Residents Residing Within a Three-mile Radius of the Downtown Center

This report is based on a summary of 422 interviews, whose respondents represent .5 percent of the population of Bakersfield residing within a three-mile radius of the Downtown Center. The summary was made in the Spring Semester, 1973. A stratified random sampling of addresses was chosen and adults at each address were interviewed either by Mr. Rhea's sociology students or by paid student interviewers. A crude measure of external validity for the survey was obtained by comparing the data produced with the 1970 census data for Bakersfield. With the exception of classification of the occupation of heads of households the interview results were within acceptable limits. Generalization is restricted to the indicated area.

Preliminary to examining the report the reader is reminded that the survey area contains a mixture of housing including some from the lower socio-economic areas of the community. As an illustration, when asked about the extent of schooling completed, 35 percent of the respondents indicated less than a high school education and another 27 percent had no postsecondary education. Of the 38 percent of the respondents with college experiences less than 12 percent laid claim to an Associate, Bachelor's or higher degree. Individuals desiring to see the tabled data on which these and other comments are based are referred to the full report submitted to the President of the College.

My thanks to Dr. Charles Carlson and Dr. James Young who aided in the construction of the instrument, to Wayne Culver, who helped phrase the statements concerning counseling, and to Lanning Flint and his staff for tabulating the survey answers. A special thanks to David Rhea and his students for their assistance and cooperation. The ultimate responsibility for the design, conclusions and any possible errors are my own.

The survey was an attempt to produce data relevant to several questions dealing with the Downtown Center and the operational philosophy of Bakersfield College generally. Each question and the conclusions suggested by this survey will be treated briefly.

What goals should be given priority for Bakersfield College?

The top five out of nine goal areas ranked according to the response means are: (1) Preparing students for specific jobs; (2) Remedial reading and arithmetic; (3) Preparing students to transfer; (4) Counseling, especially for minorities and the poor; (5) English, mathematics and science. Rankings by subgrouping according to age or ethnic origin agreed closely with this grouping. "Vocational Preparation" was also the top priority goal area identified by the Institutional Goals Inventory at Bakersfield College a year earlier.

JC 750 291

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What types of counseling are most desired?

As indicated above, counseling seems to rank well up in the priorities suggested by this survey. Cross checking the subcatagories showed that there is some difference between various groupings by ethnic origin, age, tract, etc. However, the only clear pattern that emerges is that each group rates personal problem counseling lower than counseling dealing with job skills, selection of courses, and choice of career. This suggests that increased emphasis should be given to counseling related to vocational preparation and overcoming basic skills handicaps.

What are the perceptions regarding the desirability of classes in the DTC?

When respondents were asked where they would wish to take a course given the several alternatives posed, 44 percent indicated the main campus, 21 percent opted for the Downtown Center, and 35 percent desired a local school, church, etc. Preference for the DTC by ethnic group were as follows: Anglos 22 percent, Blacks 20 percent, and Chicanos 11 percent. Of the 18-20 year old group, 54 percent preferred classes at the main campus, another 22 percent selected the DTC. When relationships between preference for the DTC and nearness to the DTC or distance from the main campus were tested correlations ranging from .1588 to .4763 were found. The evidence suggests that many people prefer to attend classes in their own neighborhoods and the DTC will draw people who would not have attended on the main campus.

Should the College experiment with alternate methods of registration?

This question can be answered very simply, "Yes." In fact the College has already experimented with mail registration for part-time students taking the television courses. Following are the alternatives with the percentage selected as first choice given in parenthesis:

In person-main campus (41%), in person-DTC (15%), by mail (18%), by phone (17%), nearby shopping center (8%).

What self-perceptions are held regarding continuing postsecondary education?

Data and conclusions in this area are shaky. Respondents apparently claimed a greater number of educational activities than were undertaken in some areas as judged from external sources such as attendance at Bakersfield College. The caveat aside, if responses are used to speculate on perceptions about where people think they might obtain continuing education in Bakersfield, the College is second only to On the Job Training and is closely followed by short courses and conferences. Managerial-professional groups claimed 1.6 educational activities each for the year. Those classified as unskilled claimed .71 each. The assumption is made that these and related figures indicate a wide-spread perception that postsecondary educational activities are important in the respondent's lives.

What affiliation is claimed with Bakersfield College?

Although 27 percent of the respondents claim to have had formal affiliation with Bakersfield College only 5 percent indicated that they had completed a program. These figures stand as indictment and challenge to the College.

What factors are suggested sufficient to prevent people from enrolling at Bakersfield College?

Here are the factors suggested and the percentage responding that an adult in their household does not attend BC because of them: Transportation, 16 percent; cost, 20 percent; lack of skill in the "3R's," 11 percent; not comfortable in college, 14 percent; and, doesn't know what college offers, 21 percent.

In every case the percentage of response indicated that the item was a more serious factor for minorities than for Anglos. Outreach, keeping direct costs to students down, and directed advertising are suggested solutions.

What are the preferred times and days for classes?

As might be expected the preferred times are 7-10 p.m. and 9-11 a.m. on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

What is the preferred mode of transportation?

The automobile is the means of transportation preferred by most of the residents of the surveyed area. Bus transportation is also important.

What courses are perceived as most likely to be of interest to respondent and members of their households?

The courses most frequently chosen were English, reading, math, supervision and management training. This group was followed by art, home economics, speech, child development, office skills, music and accounting. Although there were some differences in the rankings of the twenty-five course areas there was a high degree of correlation among the various ethnic groups in ranking the courses by preference.

Should courses be taught in Spanish?

Further discussion of the question with Spanish speaking residents may be appropriate. It is evident that the Chicano respondents saw this as a need since 69% of them answered in the affirmative to this question.

Summary

Although it has generated more discussion and may be expected to enroll more students than any other single satellite learning center in the district, the Downtown Center may be placed in perspective by noting that it will be added to over twenty off-campus sites where instruction is already offered by Bakersfield College. It will soon be necessary to examine the effectiveness of these efforts to extend our services to the community. The likelihood of that accounting being positive will be greatly enhanced if the faculty joins with the administration in exploring the implications found in this survey and elsewhere.

Final planning for the opening of the Downtown Center and other planning for the College should incorporate response to the changing demands on our resources. How, for example, should the College respond to the suggested ranking of goals? Survey respondents placed "preparing students for specific jobs" at the head of the list of priorities for the College. Their responses are consistent with a national trend which suggests ". . . a lessening in the demand for a traditional

college education and a rising demand for career education. . ." (Bushnell, 1973:116) and the prediction of a panel of 385 experts that the likelihood is "high" that "the proportion of students in postsecondary vocational programs will increase." (Huckfeldt 1972:41) Another example of a shift in the type of service demanded may be indicated by the location of remedial reading and arithmetic as second among the goals. This surprising ranking may cause us to ponder the prediction of Bushnell, "Tomorrow's institutions will select their most able instructors to work with the low-achieving student. As learning specialists, they will enjoy a certain status and have administrative backing for their efforts." (1973:112)

This report may be best used along with other information such as the Institutional Goals Inventory for Bakersfield College reported by the Educational Testing Service in July of 1972, the specialized knowledge of various faculty and staff members, and other institutional data. Other surveys should be conducted to sample the opinions of residents in other portions of our service area. Needs assessment should be an ongoing activity. The administration, the Academic Senate, departments, and special groups--such as the College Directions Committee--need to monitor available information, suggest additional information which should be sought, and provide leadership to enable each of us to participate in shaping our institution to more fully meet the demands placed on a community college.

SOURCES CITED

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